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ABSTRACT

This paper presents 13 research and theory driven methods and strategies for the college reading and learning program. The strategies described are: (1) promoting developmental growth and learning; (2) using a course simulation model; (3) using undergraduate teaching assistants; (4) employing peer teaching; (5) using high utility strategies for immediate acceptance; (6) promoting strategy control and regulation; (7) reconceptualizing vocabulary development; (8) broadening conceptual background knowledge; (9) systematically training students to utilize strategies; (10) using research-validated learning strategies; (11) using writing to develop reading comprehension and critical thinking; (12) using more reliable assessment procedures than standardized tests; and (13) being an active professional. (Twenty-two references are attached.) (RS)

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Baker's Dozen of Best Ideas for College Learning Specialists

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ABSTRACT

Baker's Dozen of Best Ideas for College Learning Specialists

The following pages present a "Baker's Dozen" of research and theory driven methods and strategies for the college reading and learning program. Methods and strategies include PORPE; PLAE; the Notetaking Training and Evaluation Scales; and the Languages of the Disciplines model among others. The ideas were delivered by the authors to a session at the annual conference of the Illinois Reading Council of the International Reading Association on March 16, 1991 in Springfield, Illinois.

A BAKER'S DOZEN OF BEST IDEAS FOR COLLEGE LEARNING SPECIALISTS

Promote Developmental Growth and Learning to Learn The key to moving beyond the "basic skills" approach to college reading instruction and also to gaining greater professional respect lies in adopting an academic orientation of the instructor as "learning specialist" rather than as only a "remedial/developmental" reading specialist. With the former, the instructor operates from a philosophical perspective stressing strategic approaches to reading-to-learn as driven by the cognitive sciences and recent research in reading pedagogy. The learning specialist views his or her mission as one of assisting students to become successful, independent learners. On the other hand, the more traditional skills approach reflects a deficit model (and hence stigma) drawn from the diagnostic-compensatory movement. In this case, the instructor looks upon his or her mission as teaching students specific skills that have not been mastered. Unfortunately, the teaching of isolated skills is not likely to provide for transfer to students' immediate and real tasks (i.e., the mastery of concepts in their content area courses).

Use a Course Simulation Model In a developmental studies program where students are not enrolled concurrently in a credit-bearing, content-area course, consider teaching strategies through the simulation model (King, Stahl, & Brozo, 1984; Nist & Hynd, 1985; Nist & Kirby 1986). The goal of such a model is to

replicate the tasks and texts of a typical lower-division course that most students are required to take after completion of the developmental education requirement. The model seeks to simulate the chosen course to the greatest degree possible. Hence, students must purchase the course's textbook and supplemental materials. Then throughout the simulation experience, students read and study the chapters as the learning specialist teaches the domain specific study strategies. Students can also receive practice in taking lecture notes with appropriate videotaped lectures or guest lectures from professors who regularly teach the target course. During the lecture presentations the learning specialist should model good notetaking strategies on an overhead projector. The end point of the simulation experience is the passing of an examination like that encountered in the regular course. When students exit the simulation course, they take with them a physical product (marked text and class notes), a cognitive product (greater prior knowledge and experience), and several domain specific and general study strategies.

Use Undergraduate Teaching Assistants Academic regulations governing students in developmental reading programs often act to segregate them from the general college population. Unfortunately, this situation prevents students from having the opportunity to develop relationships with positive role models. To overcome this problem, consider the use of "undergraduate teaching assistants" who are funded with work-study money, who receive independent study credit, or who serve in an honorary society such as Phi Eta Sigma. These assistants should be successful students who possess an academic worldliness, a repertoire of

efficient and effective learning strategies, and a desire to pass this "insider knowledge" to another student. The undergraduate teaching assistants can work with triads, small groups, or with individual students needing intensive assistance or other forms of mentoring. Variations of the mentorship plan can be adapted from the Language Study model (Sartain, 1981; Sartain et.al., 1982), the Learning Counseling model (Garfield & McHugh, 1978) or the Supplemental Instruction model (Martin, 1980).

Employ Peer Teaching When students are concurrently enrolled in credit bearing courses, group them into study triads or cluster groups focusing on classes that tend to cause problems. For example, three students might select Humanities 101, while another triad could work on Physics 1A. Throughout the term as the learning specialist introduces various generic learning strategies, each triad can modify the strategies to the tasks and to the texts of their targeted course. Furthermore, the students can provide peer assistance and mentorship to each other by completing activities such as (1) cross-checking each other's lecture notes for accuracy and completeness, (2) peer teaching difficult problems or concepts encountered in the lecture or text, (3) helping each other monitor and evaluate personal understandings of the course content, (4) preparing for exams by quizzing each other and listening to talk-throughs of major concepts, (5) debriefing each other after examinations, and (6) providing general emotional support. The instructor can monitor the effectiveness of each triad's endeavors by holding biweekly conferences.

Use High Utility Strategies for Immediate Acceptance Experienced college learning specialists realize that many students enter required reading courses with a negative attitude about having been assigned to a "remedial" class. Consequently, rather than starting the semester with processes that may take several weeks or all term for students to reap the benefits (e.g., scheduling activities), begin by teaching a high utility strategy that promotes immediate transfer to other course work. Instruction on how to take notes (Stahl, King, & Henk in-press) from lectures or to use a structured study strategy (Stahl & Henk, 1985) from assigned readings provides such an avenue to immediate use. Another option might be to teach students how to employ Nist's (1987) procedures for annotation and underlining of text. Once the students realize that there is value in these strategies, they are apt to accept long term projects with equal value.

Promote Strategy Control and Regulation The savvy college student knows how to undertake operations necessary for control and regulation of learning strategies. Most developmental studies students, however, must learn (1) to establish goals, allocate resources (i.e., select strategies , allot time), and make a plan of action that incorporates the appropriate strategies and distributes over time: (b) to have a repertoire of strategies for the numerous tasks and texts encountered in postsecondary learning since there is no best method or generic approach to study; (c) to select the most appropriate strategies based on the characteristics of text, task, and personal learning preferences; (d) to activate and monitor a plan of action and make appropriate changes, when necessary; and

(e) to evaluate their plan's success or failure in order to plan for future situations.

PLAE is a research-driven (Nist, Simpson, Olejnik, & Mealey 1988; Nist & Simpson, 1989), recursive model that involves students in four stages of mastering strategy control and regulation. In Stage 1, **Preplanning**, students find out information about the test and set performance goals by answering a set of guiding questions. In Stage 2, **Listing**, students list the most appropriate strategies and construct a task-specific study plan that outlines their specific goal for each study session, the amount of time they predict it will take to reach their goal, and where they will study. In Stage 3, **Activating**, students implement and monitor the plan's effectiveness and make adjustments if their plans are not working. Stage 4, **Evaluation**, occurs after students have received their test scores. Students evaluate their performance by diagnosing errors and looking for patterns of strengths and weaknesses. This information is then used as they plan for subsequent tasks (e.g., exams).

Reconceptualize Vocabulary Development Students entering the milieu of postsecondary education need to understand from the onset that the fundamental avenue for academic success is the ability to quickly expand their vocabulary (Simpson, 1991; Stahl, Brozo & Simpson, 1987). Hence, college learning specialists must provide experiences that immerse students in (1) the "language of the academy" or the terminology that allows the institution to function (e.g. terms such as provost, bursar, financial aid), (2) the "language of the educated" or

the advanced general vocabulary used by scholars as they communicate, and (3) the specialized "languages of the disciplines" or those unique technical terms, symbols,etc. which permit scholars within a field to communicate effectively and efficiently.

To help students master the vocabulary in category one, draw heavily upon the institution's printed materials, particularly the college catalog and the student handbook. Generative vocabulary activities such as Haggard's (1982) "Self Collection Strategy," McKeown's (1983) "Word of the Week", and Pauk's (1984) "Frontier System" are effective strategies for developing greater fluency with vocabulary in category two. Finally, students can promote independent learning of technical vocabulary in category three with Sartain's (1982) "Technical Vocabulary Log for Study Triads" or Simpson, Nist and Kirby's (1987) "Concept Cards."

Broaden Conceptual Background Knowledge Most students required to take a college reading course can read, but they are not efficient and effective independent learners. Because these students are often aliterate and possess huge gaps in their prior knowledge, they are not generally prepared to read regularly, widely, or to critically. Hence, the college learning specialist must meet the needs of students who have a deficiency in general and content specific knowledge and along with many misconceptions about the learning process. We do not propose that such problems can be overcome in one "developmental education" experience. Yet, learning specialists can promote the habit of reading

regularly and widely and the development of greater general knowledge and vocabulary through the creative use of periodicals such as Newsweek, U.S. News and World Reports, or Time during the weekly classroom routine. Learning specialists can also provide higher level background experiences while teaching students to learn about a specific theme/concept by utilizing or adapting Bartholomae and Petrosky's (1987) "Basic Reading/Basic Writing" model.

Systematically Train Students to Utilize Strategies One of the primary goals of the college learning specialist is to lead students to become self-motivated and self-directed users and later designers of efficient and effective strategies and tactics of learning. In meeting these goals, consider using a four step training procedure (King & Stahl, 1985; Stahl, King & Henk, in-press) that includes components of modeling, practicing, evaluating and reinforcing. In the intial training component of modeling the instructor demonstrates the use of a strategy such as a notetaking system during an academic event in a content field class or during the simulation of an academic event in a developmental studies class. During the session/s, the instructor employs think-alouds and self-report strategies to explain her/his rationale for undertaking various tactics as part of implementing an overall notetaking strategy. Then after each session is completed, the instructor shares with the students retrospective reports of the perceived successes or the failures as well as the rationale for any fix-up tactics employed. As the modeling procedure continues across the training period, under the observation and guidance of the instructor, the students employ the strategy. Opportunities are provided for peer-modeling and group reflection activities as the students master the strategy.

Then long-term, monitored practice is undertaken throughout the remainder of the term as students use (or adapt) the learned strategy in a selected course. In order to build confidence with the technique and also to promote transfer to new situations, care must be taken to have students practice in a course that specifically lends itself to the strategy. Later the students may branch out to other courses as the strategy becomes second nature to them. If the students are enrolled in a simulation model, the instructor must provide appropriate practice materials representative of the content from a range of lower division courses.

Throughout the practice period, each of the students undergoes regular evaluation of her/his strategy usage. For instance, with the Notetaking Observation Training and Evaluation Scales (Stahl, King & Henk, in-press) the learner uses an ordered set of objective, scaled criterion behaviors associated with effective notetaking for evaluating and monitoring progress towards becoming an efficient notetaker. Then based on the aforementioned criteria, the instructor or another student in the class reviews the student's notes and provides feedback on a weekly basis. Like procedures have been described by Simpson (1986). Reinforcement of positve behaviors is received through the on-going cooperative review sessions and the charting of points across the term.

Use of Research-Validated Learning Strategies Instruction with textbook study systems (e.g., SQ3R, PQRST, RSYP, ORWET) has been a staple of the college reading/learning program for over 50 years.(Stahl & Henk, 1986). Still many of the

methods presented to college students have yet to be validated credibly by research or have been researched with students atypical of the population served in developmental programs. However, a rather promising comprehensive strategy entitled PORPE (Simpson, 1986) has been developed by using the introspective reports of successful college learners and current theory and research on reading, studying, and writing. PORPE has been validated in two investigations (Simpson, Stahl, & Hayes, 1989; Simpson, Hayes, Stahl, Connor, & Weaver, 1988; Simpson, Stahl, Hayes, 1988) involving high-risk college students trained to employ the strategy while studying Introduction to Psychology textbook chapters.

With PORPE, students are learn to **Predict** potential essay questions to guide their studying; to **Organize** key ideas which answer those predicted questions using their own words, structure, and methods; to **Rehearse** the key ideas; to **Practice** the recall of those key ideas in self-assigned essays; and to **Evaluate** the completeness, accuracy, and appropriateness of the essays via a checklist. These five steps of PORPE are synergistic as they build upon each other and lead learners through the cognitive and metacognitive processes essential to successful independent learning.

Use Writing to Develop Reading Comprehension and Critical Thinking A number of tested strategies have been employed as an integral step in processes designed to elicit students' prior knowledge, improve their reading comprehension, and to teach them independent study strategies. Many learning specialists, however, overlook the value of writing to help teach reading (Hayes, Stahl, &

Simpson, in-press)--either as a step in a strategy or by itself.

Either way, writing aids students in becoming co-creators of the texts they read, in creating their own articulated understanding of content material, and in providing a means of monitoring and revising that understanding. For instance, to elicit background knowledge before a new reading assignment, the learning specialist can ask students to freewrite on the general subject of the assignment, to write down all the questions the reading passage's title brings to mind, or to skim first and last paragraphs and main headings in the passage and then freewrite on what they predict the passage will say or even on questions about or objections to what they think will appear in the passage. The learning specialist can also ask that as students read, they pause for three minutes before going on to the next main heading (or if no headings appear, after every couple of pages) to summarize what they have just read, to write down questions about what remains unclear, or to respond personally to what they have just read. In addition, it's always a good idea to have students reflect on the entire passage during a 10- to 15-minute freewriting response. Such writing not only engages students in the reading material, it also gives them an opportunity to monitor their understanding and to contribute more knowledgeably to class discussions. In a sense, writing about reading material turns the reading process inside out, exposing readers to the inescapably constructivist activity of creating meaning in and from words.

Use More Reliable Assessment Procedures Many college reading programs overrely on standardize reading tests to assess students' abilities upon their entry

into a program and later to determine whether students are ready to exit the program. We suggest that learning specialists should utilize assessment devices that reflect the reading/study tasks students will be required to undertake in lower division courses. One way such assessment can be accomplished is through a simulation of a typical learning experience.

In undertaking this procedure you might distribute to students an introductory chapter from a sociology text on a Monday with the assignment to prepare for an objective and an essay examination over the material on Friday. Then on the exam day collect the chapter and the materials the students used for study, and give the examination under normal test conditions. Whether used for entry level diagnosis or as an exit level competency demonstration, each student's work is evaluated for both process and product. To evaluate the students' processes of study, review with the aid of a checklist text markings (if any) and any other materials (i.e., notes, outlines). By reviewing a student's text markings and/or text notes, the learning specialist can determine whether he/she utilizes text structure to identify superordinate and subordinate ideas or translates information into his/her own words. To evaluate the products of study, the objective and essay questions can be scored. Differences in scores between the two measures should be noted. In addition, a holistic evaluation of the essay could be done to gain an additional measure of students' ability to articulate clear understanding of content and relationships among superordinate and subordinate ideas. This information can then be shared with students in small groups or in individual conferences.

Be an Active Professional As a final recommendation in our baker's dozen, we urge you to become an active professional in the college reading and learning community. First and foremost, join the organizations such as the College Reading Association, the College Reading Special Interest Group of the International Reading Association., the National Association of Developmental Education, and the College Reading and Learning Association that support our mission. Secondly it is imperative that college reading and learning experts read critically the journals related to our profession (e.g. Reading Research and Instruction, Journal of Reading, Journal of Developmental Education, Journal of College Reading and Learning, Research & Teaching in Developmental Education, and Forum for Reading). Through such reading, as you grow more sophisticated so does your program and, in a sense, the overall field. This is particularly true as you gain in sophistication by reading and evaluating not only "how to do it articles" and policy papers but also more the scholarly theoretical discussions and research-driven articles.

Thirdly, you should also be an active member in our profession by presenting papers or delivering workshops at local, state, regional, and national conferences and by writing for publication in state and national journals, newsletters, and yearbooks. There is a crying need for our colleagues in other branches of reading pedagogy to know more about the valuable services rendered and the professional knowledge generated by our profession. Through such activities you can be a mentor to new college learning specialists by sharing ideas, experiences, successful instructional strategies, and your best ideas for college learning programs.

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